

G/S-39

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NOVAYA ZEMLYA

Novaya Zemlya is a long, mountainous archipelago consisting of two major islands and a number of smaller ones strategically located off the Soviet Arctic mainland. Structurally, it is a northern extension of the Ural Mountains. The central mountain chain extends nearly the entire length of the archipelago; the northern part is covered by an extensive ice cap. Numerous fiords and bays indent the coast line and the narrow, winding, navigable strait of Proliv Matochkin Shar divides the two islands.

The climate of the islands is characterized by brief, cold, foggy summers; long, cold, humid winters; ever present clouds; and incessant winds. The persistent winds often reach velocities that prohibit air operations. Low winter temperatures hamper outdoor activities; when accompanied by strong winds, all operations, including flying are curtailed. Seasonal variations in the length of daylight, which culminated in a 2- to 3-month period of total darkness in winter, affect all activities in the islands.

The ice-free navigation season in this area is limited to only a few months in late summer. Ice conditions vary greatly from year to year, and these conditions are further complicated by interrelations of the relatively warm Nordkap Current of the Gulfstream, the cold Kara Sea, and changing winds. Generally the west coast is not free of ice until the beginning of July but in some years it is free by the end of May. Because of the cold water of the Kara Sea, ice conditions are more severe on the east coast than on the Barents Sea coast. In most years, ice is found along the east coast until August or September; but offshore winds can

temporarily move the ice several miles to sea. For Novaya Zemlya as a whole, optimum ice conditions occur in the fall after the old sea ice melts and before the young ice forms.

The population is very sparse and is concentrated at airfields, polar stations, and other small settlements along the coasts. The interior is uninhabited except for migratory reindeer herdsman and a few seasonal hunters. The native Nentsy people are organized into collectives and are engaged in fishing, hunting, trapping and herding. Whether there are forced laborers on Novaya Zemlya now is unknown, but reportedly they have been engaged in mining operations in the past.

Air facilities, consisting of airfields and sea plane stations, are distributed along the perimeter of Novaya Zemlya. The largest airfield is located at Belush'ya Guba on the southwestern coast of the archipelago and has a gravel surfaced runway 6,600 feet in length. Jet fighters and helicopters have been stationed here and 3 radar sites are located in the vicinity. Other airfields on Novaya Zemlya are small and used to supply the nearby settlements. These airfields include Mys Zhelaniya, Russkaya Gavan', Smidivich, Krestovaya Guba, Malyye Karmakuly, Krasino, Mys Vykhnodny, Matochkin Shar, and Ostrov Pakhtusova.